

Commissioner Deborah A. Gist's Weekly Field Memo
Friday, September 30, 2011

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Action Item Calendar

October 14: School-prayer assurance due
October 24: Student enrollment and addresses due
October 27: School Safety and Mitigation Conference registration form due
November 1: Submission and snapshot reports due
November 15: Deadline for final selections of district teachers of the year
December 1: Districts verify all personnel assignments
June 30, 2012: Schools and districts submit final personnel assignments

Notes from Commissioner Gist:

1. Teachers of the Year invited to RIPEC dinner with Secretary Duncan

As you may know, Education Secretary Arne Duncan will be the keynote speaker at the Rhode Island Public Expenditure Council (RIPEC) Annual Dinner, on November 2. RIPEC has graciously offered to invite all 2012 District Teachers of the Year and their superintendents to be guests at this dinner. This is a very generous offer, which will give many of our best educators a chance to hear first-hand Secretary Duncan's thoughts on the state of education in America.

As you know, we are taking several steps to celebrate, support, and recognize our state's hard-working teachers. Honoring a Teacher of the Year from every district is one of those steps.

If you have already selected a 2012 District Teacher of the Year, we will send that information to RIPEC and we will contact you with details about the dinner within the next two weeks. If you plan to select a District Teacher of the Year sometime before November 2, please let me know and we will send that information to RIPEC as well so that they can have an accurate head count.

Our goal is for *every* district to have a 2012 Teacher of the Year. Once again, I encourage you to select a District Teacher of the Year, and you can use the streamlined application form that we have posted on our Web site:

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/EducatorQuality/Recognition/default.aspx>

2. PARCC encourages educators to sign up for newsletter, updates

We are really proud to be on the Governing Board of the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) consortium, which is working to develop the next-generation assessments in English and mathematics. PARCC has begun publication of a monthly newsletter to provide the field with information and updates about the consortium and to highlight voices of support from educators. If you would like to receive the newsletter, you can sign up on the PARCC home page:

<http://www.parcconline.org/>

3. Superintendents required to assure compliance with law on school prayer – *Action Item*

As required by federal law, I must receive from all LEAs a written statement of assurance that no policy of the LEA prevents, or otherwise denies, participation in constitutionally protected prayer in public elementary and secondary schools as detailed in the Guidance. The Guidance

was published in the Federal Register on February 28, 2003, and is available at http://www.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/religionandschools/prayer_guidance.html.

For your assurance to me, you may use the following language:

Certification of Compliance with the Law on Constitutionally Protected Prayer

This is to certify that no policy of my school district/s prevents or otherwise denies participation in constitutionally protected prayer in public elementary and secondary schools as set forth in the "Guidance on Constitutionally Protected Prayer in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools," issued February 7, 2003. This certification applies to the school years 2011-12.

Please sign and date your assurance, note your district name, and fax the assurance to the attention of Elliot Krieger, at 222-6178, or e-mail it to elliott.krieger@ride.ri.gov, by Friday, **October 14**.

Thank you for your help on this matter.

From RIDE:

4. Funds available for National Board certification

Please see this notice from our Office of Educator Quality and Certification:

There are still some remaining funds for the National Board subsidy program for the 2011-12 school year. As part of the subsidy program, combined federal and state funds provide \$2,000 toward the \$2,500 assessment fee. Please share this information with educators in your district and encourage them to visit the National Board Web site, www.nbpts.org, and the RIDE Web site, http://www.ride.ri.gov/EducatorQuality/natl_board_cert.aspx, to learn more about this important professional growth opportunity.

Please contact Andre Audette (andre.audette@ride.ri.gov, 222-5105) with any questions.

5. Meeting scheduled to discuss teacher-course-student data collection

Please see this notice from our Office of Educator Quality and Certification:

On **Tuesday** (October 4), from 9:30 – 11 a.m., there will be a meeting for district and school data managers to discuss teacher-course-student data collection requirements for the current school year. Please make every effort to ensure that your data manager attends this important data collection session. Mary Ann Snider, Chief of Educator Excellence and Instructional Effectiveness, will lead the meeting.

The meeting will be held at RIDE (80 Washington St., Providence 02904) in Room 260. Registration is required. Please register at:

<https://www.eride.ri.gov/workshopReg/ViewWorkshop.aspx?workshopid=333>

6. Work under way on self-assessments for evaluations; sample Student Learning Objectives posted

Please see this notice from our Office of Educator Quality and Certification:

Thank you for sending comments and feedback on the forms and other documents being used this year for gradual implementation of the educator-evaluation system. While we can't modify the hard-copy guidebook you have received, we are making changes to the electronic versions of forms so that they better meet your needs.

As we begin the evaluation process around the state, it is evident that everyone is being thoughtful and approaching the process seriously. We have heard from some teachers that they are spending 4 hours or more completing the self assessment. That was never the intent of the working group of educators who developed the self-assessment. Everyone is different, but most people should spend no more than an hour using the self-assessment to identify one professional goal for this year.

There has been some confusion about the requirements of self-assessments. The purpose of the self-assessment is to help teachers identify strengths and areas of improvement to inform their Professional Growth Plan. It is a tool to help educators develop goals. The Rhode Island Model does not require that self-assessments be submitted to evaluators, but districts may make local decisions to require submission of the self-assessments. We do suggest that each district make a consistent decision about this for all schools in a district. The Professional Growth Plans must be shared with evaluators.

If you have any questions, please contact Lisa Foehr at lisa.foehr@ride.ri.gov.

Please note that 9 additional sample Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) have been posted on our Web site at:

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/EducatorQuality/EducatorEvaluation/SLO.aspx>

And a reminder: Module Two for Personnel Evaluating Building Administrators begins **Wednesday** (October 5) and ends October 26. Register at:

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/EducatorQuality/EducatorEvaluation/TrainingReg.aspx>

Keep sending us your feedback. We are all learning a lot already, and we will continue to modify forms and find ways to support you this year. A new FAQ document will be posted this coming week, based on questions we have received from teachers. Hopefully, this will be helpful to you and your teachers.

From the U.S. Department of Education:

7. President Obama delivers annual Back to School speech

Please see this notice from the Office of Communications and Outreach:

This week, President Obama delivered his third annual Back to School speech at Benjamin Banneker Academic High School - a 2007 National Blue Ribbon School - in Washington, D.C. As in past years, this was an opportunity for the President to speak directly to students. The speech was broadcast live (on MSNBC and online) and shown in schools across the country. Below are some excerpts:

All of you have a lot on your plates. You guys are growing up faster and interacting with a wider world in a way that old folks like me, frankly, just didn't have to. So, today, I don't want to be just another adult who stands up and lectures you like you're just kids - because you're not just kids. You're this country's future. You're young leaders. And, whether we fall behind or race ahead, as a nation, is going to depend in large part on you. So, I want to talk to you a little bit about meeting that responsibility.

It starts, obviously, with being the best student that you can be.... It means that you have to stay at it. You have to be determined, and you have to persevere. It means you've got to work as hard as you know how to work. And, it means that you've got to take some risks once in a while. You can't avoid the class that you think might be hard because you're worried about getting the best grade - if that's a subject that you think you need to prepare you for your future. You've got to wonder. You've got to question. You've got to explore. And, every once in a while, you need to color outside of the lines.... That's what school is for - discovering new passions, acquiring new skills, making use of this incredible time that you have to prepare yourself and give yourself the skills that you're going to need to pursue the kind of careers that you want.

I want all of you to set a goal to continue your education after you graduate. If that means college for you, just getting into college is not enough. You have to graduate. One of the biggest challenges we have right now is that too many of our young people enroll in college but don't actually end up getting their degree.... As a consequence, [whereas] our country used to have the world's highest proportion of young people with a college degree, we now rank 16th. That's not good enough. We've got to make sure your generation gets us back to the top of having the most college graduates relative to the population of any country on Earth. If we do that, you guys will have a brighter future, and so will America.

In his remarks, the President also spoke about the tireless work America's teachers do on behalf of students. For more information, see:

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2011/09/28/president-obama-back-school-set-your-sights-high>.

8. U.S. Department of Education promotes student entrepreneurship

Please see this message from the Division of Academic and Technical Education:

As part of an Administration-wide emphasis on youth entrepreneurship, the U.S. Department of Education is encouraging students to come up with ideas for improving education and increasing student success.

Our first effort this fall is in cooperation with the World Series of Innovation competition, a project of the Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship (NFTE). NFTE and the Department are inviting middle-school and high-school students to develop their own ideas to promote college- and career-readiness. Winning students will be recognized and receive awards.

All teachers and counselors working with middle-school and high-school students are eligible to participate. Registration and a free toolkit are available at:

www.nfte.com/innnovation.

Please contact NFTE with any questions about the competition. To share ideas about working with the Department on student entrepreneurship to promote college- and career-readiness, please contact Scott.Hess@ed.gov.

From other government agencies:

9. Fulbright Program announces exchange, study opportunities for teachers

The Fulbright Program, of the Department of State Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, is accepting applications for the Fulbright Teacher Exchange Program, which exchanges U.S. and foreign teachers for a semester or an academic year. The application deadline is October 15. The Distinguished Fulbright Awards in Teaching Program allows U.S. teachers to study or complete a project in a foreign country; the deadline for the program is December 15. For information on both Fulbright programs, see:

<http://www.fulbrightteacherexchange.org/>

Other:

10. Classwish.org seeks to provide resources to schools, teachers

Dean Alexander “Sasha” Sidorkin, at the Feinstein School of Education and Human Development at Rhode Island College, has brought to my attention Classwish.org, a nonprofit organization that seeks to provide resources to schools and teachers. Classwish provides this description of its program:

- Teachers visit the site to create Wish Lists of the items they need to equip great classrooms, as easily as shopping online
- Visitors see exactly what is needed and make tax-deductible donations to help
- Many companies match employees’ donations, which can double their funding
- ClassWish has the items shipped directly to the teachers at no cost

For more information, see:

<http://classwish.org/>

While I was not familiar with ClassWish and I thank Dean Sidorkin for sharing with me, I have donated through DonorsChoose.org, a similar site.

11. Applications accepted for awards to urban schools

The National Center for Urban School Transformation is accepting applications for the National Excellence in Urban Education Awards through November 18. The center gives these awards annual to urban schools to recognize and reward exceptional educators and students, to provide a benchmark of excellence, and to expand the knowledge base of best practices. The winners receive \$2,500 in cash and travel costs for a symposium in San Diego in May. For more information, e-mail ncust@mail.sdsu.edu, or see:

www.schooltransformer.com

RIDE will post this field memo on Tuesday, at:

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/Commissioner/fieldmemos/default.aspx>